



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

THOSE HOLY FIELDS:

BEING SUNDAY EVENING THOUGHTS FOR OUR CHILDREN
CONCERNING

"Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed,
For our advantage, to the bitter cross."

BY THE REV. C. H. CHASE.

IX.

JA-UNI.

"The land that was desolate shall become like the garden of Eden."
Ezekiel xxxvi. 35.

THE croaking of innumerable frogs in the marshy grounds by Merom's waters is not a pleasant lullaby. But here we are, ready for a canter in the early morning across the old battlefield (Joshua xi. 5). What a battle that was, and how it fixed the northern boundary for Israel, as the battle of Beth-horon did the southern boundary. We pass hills to our right burrowed with numberless caves. Suddenly we reach a spot which is a pleasant contrast to anything we have seen before. Here is a village, the houses all built of stone. Numbers of men, women, and children are gathering out the stones from the land, others are road-making or wall-building; carts such as we have seen in Switzerland are in use; all seems prosperous.

This we learn is a Jewish colony, settled on land purchased by the Rothschild family, and its name is Ja-uni. The land long left desolate, uncultivated, is now becoming fruitful, and the words of Ezekiel, here at least, are proving a true prophecy.

What is being done in far-off Palestine may be done, dear child, in your young life. Have you had a piece of garden given you which had been neglected, and have you worked hard at it, seeing your seeds produce pretty flowers, and your mustard and cress grow—oh! so quickly?

So it may be with your life. The great, the noble, the good were once young, like you, perhaps with fewer opportunities.

Shall you wait till all is very easy to follow right, to do duty? No; take things as you find them. Use the present to do the duty that waits and wants you. Your life is as yet uncultivated, like the soil of Palestine; you may make almost anything of it if you *will*. Plant in it noble aims, holy thoughts, kind deeds, and they will spring up a goodly crop. Then, by-and-bye, with greater opportunities, planning wisely, feeling nobly, and doing unselfishly, you will be a blessing to very many.

Along this path may the Good Spirit lead you forth. Hearts are desolate and bare; it is given to you to make them bright, joyous, if you will.

Cultivate your own heart first, afterwards you shall do something to make your dear land of England like the Lord's own Garden of Eden.

"Do the thing that's nearest,
Though it's dull at times;
Helping, when you meet them,
Lame dogs over stiles."

X.

FIRST VIEW OF GALILEE.

"Jesus went about all Galilee teaching . . . and healing."
St. Matthew iv. 23.

"CURSED is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." We learn the meaning of these words soon after passing Ja-uni. Each man's plot of ground is marked off from the next plot by a small heap of stones, so a dishonest man could easily in the night remove this heap, and add to his own plot, making his neighbours' smaller. A beautiful transparent butterfly, with blue and red spots on the hinder wings, is caught for little ones at home. The fine swallow-tailed butterfly just escapes us; in England it is rare, but here is, perhaps, as common as

any. Indeed the land is rich, not only in flowers, but in birds and insects.

A shout from some of our party on in front, followed by a sudden hush, tells of something unusual in store for us. In a few moments we reached a rising ground, and there before us, stretching away for some sixteen miles, is Galilee—that sea, or lake, dearer than any other to the heart of every Christian. There it lies, calm and peaceful amid the hills, somewhat pear-shaped, the larger end towards the north.

Well may we one and all be deeply moved. We are looking at “those Holy Fields” where eighteen hundred years ago Jesus walked, at the lake on which He sailed, at mountains whereon He prayed for nights and days.

This was Galilee, His Galilee; it is like a porch to a temple, and we feel entering upon very holy ground.

What other life is like that of Jesus? what other land has been consecrated by such holy feet? Here He went about *teaching and healing*.

“Never man spake like this man.” Learn, then, to love His words. Study them carefully till they sink into your hearts, and become part of your life.

Wherever He went they brought the sick, for never man sympathised so tenderly with all sufferers. Learn the secret of tenderness, find out the spell of His power.

Behold the *Man*—perfect man. Never think because Jesus was so great and good He is too high above and beyond you as not to be in touch with you. Those among whom He went about did not think so. Even the little children ran to Him, and climbed upon his knees, and were not afraid of Him. “Perfect love casts out fear,” and His perfect love cast out their fear.

“Jesus who lived above the sky,
Came down to be a man and die;
And in the Bible we may see,
How very good He used to be.

He went about, He was so kind,
And cured poor people who were blind;
And many who were sick and lame,
He visited and did the same.”

XI.

THE HOUSE OF FISH.

“A fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread.”—*St. John xxi. 9.*

To have been in a fishing-boat on Galilee is a pleasure never to be forgotten. In the early morning we launch out into the deep water; some of us lie in the hinder part of the ship, and as the oars splash, and the sail flaps with the wind, we think of many a scene in that life which makes those waters for ever sacred.

Leaving the plain of Gennesaret, where our camp was pitched the night before, we round a promontory, and seeing a ruin, we land amid tall rushes by an old aqueduct crossing a small stream, and find a tent.

What a sight now greets us: two fishermen are at their breakfast; one of the two a grand-looking old man, with the manners of a nobleman. Before them is a fire of charcoal with fish baking in the coals, and bread. The old man courteously hands us a blackened fish, as he sees wonder on our faces, and we partake. Bethsaida, the home of SS. John and James, SS. Andrew and Simon. Was it not here, on this very shore, that the Son of God, after His Resurrection showed himself? The fire of coals, the fish, the bread, all reminded us of that last meal with His loved ones.

Bethsaida, “the house of fish,” such is the meaning of the name.

In the early Christian days, soon after the Master had gone home, the fish became a very sacred emblem, and in the catacombs at Rome, that wonderful burial-place of martyrs and of saints, little metal fish are to be found with the words engraved thereon, “Mayst thou save.” What had the fish to do with the Christian faith you ask? Why did the Greek for fish (*ιχθυε*) become a sort of Christian watchword?

The letters of this word are a kind of acrostic, thus:

ι (i) Jesus.
χ (ch) Christ.
θ (th) of God.

υ (U) Son.
ς (S) Saviour.

The letters in Greek form the first letters of words, meaning Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Saviour.

What a simple yet grand creed that was for men sick of the sin and luxury of a reign like that of the Emperor Nero—for poor slaves ill-treated by their masters.

Jesus was perfect man, so He could feel for them; but He was the Son of God the Saviour. He had shown this by His Resurrection. So He could save them, and raise them up to a new life here, and a glorious life afterwards.

Let nothing shake your faith in this same blessed fact. Say it again and again: "I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord."

"This is the place; here on this strand
He left His footsteps in the sand,
Here walked the waters of the sea
That laves thy shores, O Galilee,
And waves grew still at His command.

"Here to His little faithful band
He spake of truths sublime and grand,
And opened up Eternity,
This is the place.

"Thrice happy are mine eyes to see
The ground once trod by Deity;
This is to me enchanted land,
At Heaven's gate I seem to stand;
I bow the head, I bend the knee.
This is the place."—CANON BELL.

XII.

THE OLD SYNAGOGUE.

"These things saith the faithful and true witness."
Revelation iii. 14.

LEAVING ancient Bethsaida, we sail northwards, keeping near the western shore till we reach a place called Tel-Hûm, meaning High Hill, probably the site of Capernaum.

One solitary palm tree is the only living thing, except snakes, which abound.

Ruins are everywhere, covering some half a mile by a quarter of a mile.

Here is one large building* with broken columns, capitals, door lintels, all lying on the ground amid thorns and thistles: what can it be? Probably it is an old synagogue. If this be so, have we not here the very building which the kind centurion reared for his Jewish neighbours: "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." (*St. Luke vii. 5.*)

What is this large stone† with strange carving? Surely here, at either end, is what looks like a vine branch, and in the middle a vase or pot.

This stone is, with little doubt, the lintel of the principal entrance into the synagogue.

May not the vase represent the pot of manna, an emblem not out of place in a Jewish place of worship? Now turn to *St. John*, chapter vi., and read there the Master's words about "The manna" and "The living bread," and then see where it says, "These things said He in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum." We can speak with no certainty, but it may be, lying there amid the ruins of that ancient city is a stone upon which Jesus looked, and about which He spoke. If so, what stone can be more sacred?

"Thou Capernaum which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell." (*St. Matthew xi. 23.*)

Such was the terrible woe spoken by the lips of "the faithful and true Witness." How terribly true was the prophecy. Not a stone upon another of proud Capernaum, not an inhabitant left, not even a tent there, as at Bethsaida.

"The word of the Lord is true and all His works faithful."

Never doubt His word, never doubt Himself. He is always faithful to His promises, always true to His word.

St. John, in his wonderful vision, saw the same Jesus in His glory, as he had seen Him as man by the lakeside. He was still the same; His resurrection, His ascension, had not altered Him.

Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust those words of His. Words of love for loving hearts, words of warning for disobedient hearts, words of sad judgment for disloyal hearts, words of comfort for sad, aching hearts.

* Major Wilson notes four rows of columns, seven in each row, the favourite Jewish number.

† This stone measures 5 feet 8 inches long, 25 inches broad, 27 inches deep. The vase is 6½ inches deep, 8 inches wide.

Listen for His words now. Then some day you will hear His own voice as St. John heard it coming across the sea of glass, like the sound of many waters :

"He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am alive for evermore."

"He will never fail us ;
He will not forsake ;
His eternal covenant
He will never break !
Onward, then, and fear not,
Children of the day,
For His word shall never,
Never pass away !"

XIII.

T I B E R I A S.

"The sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias."

St. John vi. 1.

OUR servants, with tents and horses, have gone before us to Tiberias on the south-western shore of the lake ; so leaving the ruins of Capernaum we row back in the heat, there being not wind enough to fill our sail.

We pass Mejdel, the old Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene, who loved her Lord so truly ; one solitary palm marks the spot, as one palm marks the site of His city, Capernaum.

Tiberias, so called after the Emperor Tiberias, is a town with some 5000 people, so we are very glad to find our little tents pitched on the green grass close to the white beach, where innumerable shells are to be gathered.

What a peaceful two days we spend here, wandering along the hills, bathing in the lake, gathering flowers, or rowing on the waters.

Tiberias is one of the five sacred Jewish cities. A strange tradition is believed by these ignorant Jews. They say their Messiah is going to rise out of the lake at Tiberias, and set up His throne at Safed, a city in the hills not far off.

You and I know better than this, do we not ? We know that their Messiah and ours *has* come. That upon this lake He sailed

over and over again ; that on it He walked ; that by its shores He showed Himself after His resurrection.

And we believe He is coming again with His holy angels, coming in the clouds, "with power and great glory."

Shall we not be witnesses for this ? Not witnesses like the martyrs Polycarp or Ignatius, or the girl Theodora, or the boy Philemon. The cry is not now, thank God, "To the lions," "To the lions." You can witness in the nursery, the school-room, or the playground, for the risen, ascended Jesus. Never be ashamed to own him as your Lord and Christ. Never hear His name taken in vain without reproving it.

You can own Him in your life by a quiet, loving service. Courage under difficulties, self-control when tried, gentleness when taunted, these are marks of a witness for Christ. Such witnesses are linked on to a holy band, for whom every Sunday the churches of God give thanks to Him.

"The noble army of martyrs (witnesses) praise Thee."

"Thou art coming O my Saviour,
Thou art coming O my King.

O the joy to see thee reigning,
Thee my own beloved Lord !
Every tongue Thy name confessing,
Worship, honour, glory, blessing.
Brought to Thee with one accord,
Thee my Master and my Friend,
Vindicated and enthroned,
Unto earth's remotest end,
Glorified, adorned, and owned."